3 MISE-EN-SCÈNE

TOUCHSTONE PICTURES/THE KOBAL COLLECTION/ANTONELLO, PHILIPPE

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou (Wes Anderson, 2004), production design by Mark Friedberg

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

Most movie projects begin with a story. The screenplay fleshes out that story and offers a blueprint from which the filmmakers will work. The challenge for the production design team is to create what is placed before the camera—the film's **mise-en-scène**. Roughly translated as "putting into the scene," for most scholars mise-en-scène refers to the set, lighting, costumes, makeup, hair, and the position of the actors. Some film theorists use the term more broadly to include camera work as well, which is the subject of our next chapter.

Mise-en-scène is the responsibility of the production designers and set builders and dressers, hair and makeup departments, the cinematographer (who supervises the lighting of the film), and the director (who leads the entire production). We will take a close look at the kinds of decisions that they make so that you can analyze how mise-en-scène contributes to the visual style and story content of a film.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- **3-1** Describe the function of set design in the visual language of a film.
- **3-2** Analyze costumes, makeup, and hair with regard to character development and visual style.
- **3-3** Analyze blocking and performance with regard to design and narrative.
- **3-4** Recognize how lighting schemes contribute to aspects of design and narrative, mood, and meaning.

PLAY VIDEO ICON: This icon signals that a corresponding video clip is available in the eBook. The eBook can be accessed at cengagebrain.com.

mise-en-scène Roughly translated from the French, "putting into the scene." Mise-en-scène is composed of the set and props, the look of the characters (costumes, makeup, and hair), dramatic staging (the blocking of characters as they move about the set), and the lighting (including the position, intensity, and balance of the lights).

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

MAKING MOVIES

© 2014 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved

MARK FRIEDBERG ON PRODUCTION DESIGN

Mark Friedberg is a Hollywood production designer who has worked with many of contemporary cinema's most interesting directors. His design credits include *The Ice Storm* (Ang Lee, 1997), *Far From Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002), *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (Wes Anderson, 2004), *Broken Flowers* (Jim Jarmusch, 2005), and *Across the Universe* (Julie Taymor, 2007). Friedberg won a 2011 Emmy for outstanding art direction on *Mildred Pierce* (Todd Haynes).

Q1: What exactly does a production designer do?

A: The production designer is responsible for imagining, finding, and/or creating the world in which the characters live. This work is broken down into many components and handled by different departments that report directly to the production designer: the art department, the construction and paint departments, the set decoration department, the property department, the locations department, and the special effects department. Today many production designers work closely with the visual effects department so that their work lives within the overall design of the film.

Q2: Would you talk a bit about the process (from sketch to realization) of your work?

A: The production designer is often the first hire after the line producer and it's in that embryonic time in the production that the first conceptual discussions of the look of the film occur. This discussion grows upon the arrival of the cinematographer as the camera work is added to the conversation. Later the costume designer, the lighting designer, and then the gaffer weigh in. The first order of business is to determine the movie's visual language. Is the film to be stylized or realistic? What will the images we make look like? Will they be colorful, stark, textured, modern, rustic? As technology advances, sketching has become more and more reliant on Photoshop where we are able to render three-dimensional digital models and preview angles and lighting and set dressing options.

Q3: While stage plays ask the audience to imagine what a theater set suggests—we see a couch and table and we imagine a living room, for example—movie sets for the most part re-create the fictional world in more realistic detail. Are there fundamental differences between designing sets for the stage and for the screen?

A: Theater can tend to be a more poetic presentation of the world. In theater, the stage designer makes the frame. The shape of the story world and its intersection with the audience are defined in the set design. Where the world of the story stops and the world of the audience begins is finite. In the theater your perspective stays the same because the relationship of your seat to the stage is fixed. The theatrical viewpoint is your own but in a film you can see from various characters' points of view. Another major difference is scale. You can contrast a huge bird's-eye view with a macro close-up. A small detail can be shot in close-up and when projected be seen 80 feet long; it can possess monumental importance.

Q4: Has your experience as a designer enabled you to develop a signature style? Or is production design all about physically realizing a director's imagined world?

A: The production designer's responsibility is to make worlds. We do that by best fitting our decisions into the visual language developed with the director and cinematographer. Having said that, no two designers would render the same set for the same film.

CENGAGE brain .com **LINK TO THE FULL INTERVIEW** http://cengagebrain.com

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3-1 THE SET

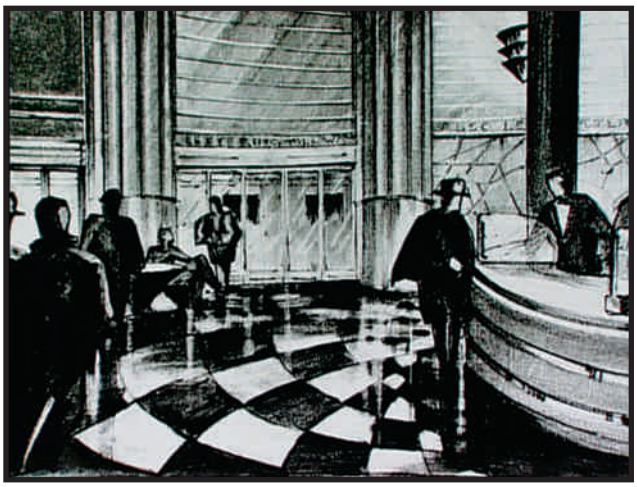
While stage plays ask the audience to imagine what a theater set suggests—we see a couch and table and we imagine a living room, we see a mock-up of a building in the background and we recognize a street scene—**movie sets** for the most part re-create locations in more realistic detail and ask that we imagine instead what it might be like to be in this apparently real living room or street. The set might be constructed on a production **soundstage**, where everything can be controlled for optimal film and sound recording, or it might be located on a real site outside of the production studio (resulting in **location shooting**). The set takes shape as a collaboration among the art department, the construction and paint departments, the set decoration department, the property department, the locations department, and in modern moviemaking the special effects department.

The set plays a significant role in how we read a scene, offering useful information regarding time, place, social class, and even the mental state of the characters. In addition, the set affects how the actors behave because it defines the space within which they operate. The set also affects where the camera and sound recording equipment can be placed, a practical detail that can have an enormous impact on the framing of the shot, as we will see in the following chapter.

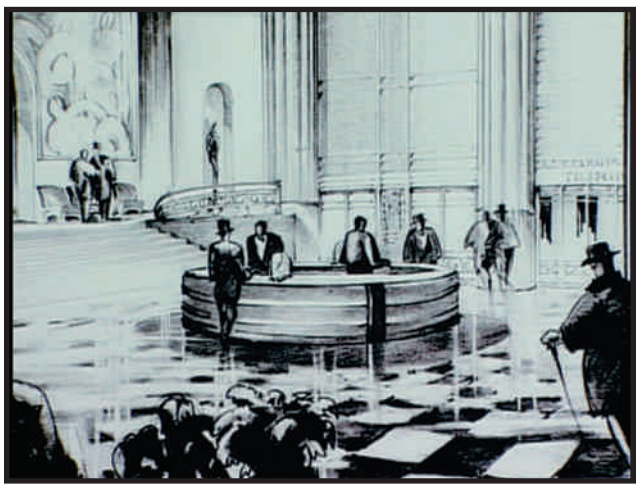
3-1a From the Drawing Board to the Screen: Set Design

Sets are sketched out by hand, previsualized on specialized computer programs, or modeled (built in miniature) well in advance of production. As the sets evolve on the "drawing board," the director and designers work out the visual language of the film, making decisions, for example, about the color palette, the choice of patterns and materials, the scale of rooms and furnishings, and the space for cameras and lighting. Once the sketches and models are approved, a myriad of artists and builders undertake the set's construction.

A particularly evocative use of soundstage set design can be found in the 1931 film *Grand Hotel*. The MGM studio set was built to replicate an opulent Berlin hotel frequented by Europe's upper classes in the last days before the fall of the Weimar Republic and the transition into Nazi Germany. The original design sketches suggest a circular space that creates the illusion of greater size (and enables panoramic moving camera shots). Details include a tiled floor, glass doors, Art Deco furnishings, and the arced reception desk at which much of the early action in the film takes place (figs. **3.1** and **3.2**).



3.1 A preliminary sketch for the lobby set in *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1931).



3.2 A second sketch highlights the scale and scope of the proposed set.

movie set Most often refers to a set constructed on a studio lot or soundstage. Also used more generally to refer to any location, real or constructed, where filming takes place.

soundstage Looking much like an airplane hangar, a soundstage is a windowless, soundproofed shooting environment.

location shooting The filming of a scene in a found location rather than in a constructed set.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

In a production still taken during the filming of one of the early scenes in *Grand Hotel*, we can begin to see how the sketches are translated into the final look of the picture (fig. **3.3**). The space occupied by the characters, which in the shot from the film appears to be the full three-dimensional space of the Grand Hotel lobby, is on the actual set relatively small. **Metonymy** is the rule here, which is to say that filmmakers use a part (the narrowly viewed constructed space of the set) to suggest the whole (the larger space in which the story takes place). We see two men walking towards a shop in the hotel lobby (fig. **3.4**), but we are meant to imagine a larger space as a bellhop in the foreground seems headed for a part of the lobby not seen in the frame. Many of the set's details—the tiled floor, glass doors, Art Deco furnishings, and the arced reception desk—serve as well to suggest the whole of the hotel lobby.

The hotel in the film is meant to exist in a real city, Berlin, and while most of the action takes place inside, the vast glass doors of the set allow for shots showing some characters peering into the hotel space (fig. **3.5**) while other characters move freely between the interior of the hotel and exterior space of the city. Because this is an indoor set in Los Angeles and not a real hotel on a city street in Berlin, the exterior of the hotel is implied or suggested; there is in reality no street but instead just more soundstage on the other side of the glass doors. No doubt the glass enhances the illusion of real exterior city space. And it also supports a larger class-distinct drama in play in the film: that there are those wealthy enough to occupy the space inside of the hotel and others who, on the other side of the glass, must watch from a distance.

3-1b Sets on Location

Real locations—both exterior and interior—can lend a degree of realism to a film. Like *Grand Hotel*, the 1998 thriller *Run Lola Run* is set in Berlin, but the *Lola* filmmakers opted to shoot on the city's streets rather than on a soundstage (fig. **3.6**). The location shots quickly establish the locale and also the trajectory of the drama: Lola must run from one end of Berlin to the other in order to rescue her wayward boyfriend, who has lost money that belongs to some pretty rough characters. The film poses three distinct outcomes all set on the same recognizable streets, each one dependent on a fateful move or moment in time wasted or saved during Lola's run.

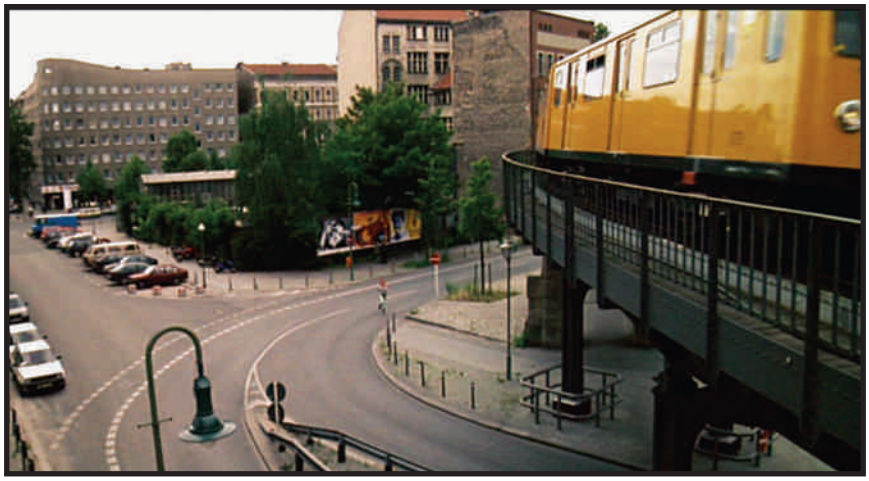
metonymy A type of metaphor in which a thing is represented through one of its attributes. Most often this rhetorical form uses a part to signify the whole, e.g., "the crown" to signify royalty.

3.3 A bird's-eye view of the lobby set in *Grand Hotel*. Note how little of the space on the MGM soundstage is used in the shot and how much is occupied by the production crew and equipment.

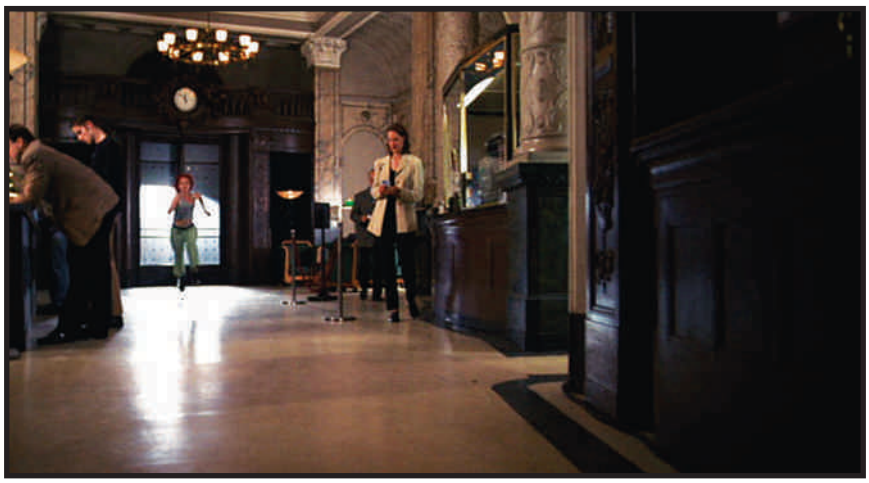
3.4 In film production, a small portion of a set can imply a larger, full-scale space, as in this shot from *Grand Hotel*.

3.5 Outside looking in. The suggestion of street space on the studio set allows for an important message about social class in *Grand Hotel*.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.



3.6 *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998) rather depends on its exterior setting: the recognizable Berlin streets that stage Lola's race against time to save her boyfriend. The location scouts clearly factored in how this specific street corner might look in the shot described in the script; the train that speeds by screen right offers a neat match for Lola's run around the curved street below.



3.7 and 3.8 Lola approaches the Deutsche Transfer Bank and then, in what seems like the inside of that building, she attempts to steal 100,000 DM. The exterior and interior sets are real all right, but neither is a bank.

One popular formula for using locations is to establish place with real exteriors and then cut to interiors on the studio soundstage or in a different real location. When we see a real exterior and then cut to an interior, the implication is clear; we have moved inside the building we have just seen. Whether or not the interior we see is really inside that specific building is not, for the filmgoer at least, important or relevant because continuity between the two sets has been established by the logical link between the two shots.

When Lola dashes into a bank in a desperate attempt to get help from her estranged father, we first see her approach a real building with a real sign that reads "Deutsche Transfer" on a real city street (fig. **3.7**). When we cut to Lola inside, we assume she has entered the building we have just seen (fig. **3.8**). In actuality, the bank exterior is that of a government building on Berlin's historic Bebelplatz and the interior is in city government offices on the Kurfursterdamm. We believe that the interior and exterior are the same place because of the logic of the sequence and because the sets are convincingly dressed.

The overall feeling of authenticity in *Run Lola Run* may well be enhanced by the location work and real sets, but, ironically, as a native Berliner would no doubt know, Lola's run does not make much geographical sense. The locations used do not track any logical route but rather were chosen for aesthetic reasons. As filmgoers we buy into the fiction of a linear run from point A to point B because the location work, sets, and editing (the subject of chapter 5) convince us that the space of the narrative is real.

3-1c Sets and Milieu

Sets establish milieu, the place and time of the film. Whether the milieu is a specific historical setting, in the

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.9 Attention to historical detail is crucial in so-called period pieces like *The Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, 1993). Note that the painting in the background resembles the costuming and staging of the characters posed in the foreground, a clever visual move that furthers the notion of authenticity.

3.10 The corporate workplace circa 1960 in *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960). No wonder C. C. Baxter, the film's central character, is willing to do almost anything to get his own office.

present day and in a recognizable space, or in some fantastic, invented locale, as filmgoers our first (and surest) key to the environment, geography, and basic rules in play (e.g., realism, science fiction, or fantasy) come from our understanding of the film's sets.

Sets play a particularly important role in films that endeavor to reproduce and re-create a specific historical setting, so-called **period pieces**. In such films, set design must convince filmgoers that the constructed space accurately reproduces a specific time and place. Though *realism* may be a misleading term to use here, since the space itself is fabricated, the effect should on some significant level appear realistic. For example, in Martin Scorsese's adaptation of Edith Wharton's 1920 novel *The Age of Innocence*, the production designer and art director establish the film's world of high society in late-nineteenth-century New York in an early scene of an annual ball in the Beauford family home (fig. **3.9**). This exquisitely furnished mansion with its lavish fine art collection telegraphs the wealth of its owners and communicates their refined taste and attention to appearances, values that become important to the central conflict of the story. The Beauford home's interior was not a wholly built set but a real place, the National Arts Club dressed to look like the family home it once was. Dressed and thus reconsidered, the National Arts Club lends an aura of realism to the setting, but it also challenged the filmmakers to move through a space that could not be structurally reconfigured (torn down and rebuilt to suit camera work and lighting).

Sets can establish an authentic milieu while offering a more vivid version of the real thing. In Billy Wilder's 1960 melodrama *The Apartment*, the film's unlikely hero, C. C. Baxter, is a middle manager for an insurance company. He works along with other such white-collar workers in a huge common room, a movie set with row after row of identical workstations (fig. **3.10**). While the set may have struck 1960s audiences as a true representation of an office space, the tight arrangement of the desks, low overhead lights, and chaotic placement of the actors was deliberately designed to be unsettling. We can appreciate Baxter's desire to move out of this space and into his own office—a desire so strong that he makes a corrupt bargain with his boss in order to get it.

While some sets aim to re-create real worlds from the past or present, many other films use sets to establish imaginary places. The filmmakers establish a "creative geography" in which various sets and design details suggest a complete if not in the strictest sense of the term "real" space. The fantastic dining hall, classrooms, and dormitories created for the Harry Potter series match descriptions known to the avid fans of J. K. Rowling, for whom accuracy to the original is essential (figs. **3.11–3.13**).

period piece A film set in the past, often characterized by lavish set design and costuming.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.11–3.13 Three sets from the film adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001), the first in the Harry Potter series.

fabricated to fill the space occupied by the fixed background color. When the images are put together we have the semblance of a film set, one in which no actor (indeed no human being) has ever set foot.

For one of the most resonant images in Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong*, the actress Naomi Watts was filmed in front of a green screen. Background images of New York City and the CGI version of the giant ape King Kong were added after the fact (figs. **3.14** and **3.15**).

Even simple logistical problems on constructed sets can be facilitated by green screen work. In a sequence in *Star Trek*, we see Spock leave one deck, enter an elevator, and then exit onto the bridge of the Enterprise. As we watch the sequence in the completed film, it appears to feature three distinct sets, but it's really just one. As Spock enters the elevator, he is shot in front of a green screen (fig. **3.16**). We then cut to the interior of the elevator, which is not an operating lift; it's just a mock-up at one end of the same bridge set. To simulate movement in the elevator and to imply Spock's transition from one interior location to another, there is a slow camera move of about 180 degrees. When the door to the elevator swings open, we see Spock exit onto the bridge, a physical space the actor has, in reality, never left.

3-1d Sets and Special Effects

In contemporary filmmaking, especially in science fiction, futurist, and fantasy films, sets are often enhanced, at times wholly created, by compositing or matting and/or **CGI** (computer-generated imagery). In such cases, set design (technically, set extension) becomes an aspect of postproduction special effects and computer re-creation.

Compositing allows the filmmaker to fabricate a set from distinct images. An actor performs in front of a backdrop of a single color (usually blue or green, hence the alternate terms for compositing: blue screen and green screen). Separate images are then shot or

3-1e Stylized Sets

For a handful of films, realism is beside the point as sets serve to call attention to artifice and highlight the stylized as opposed to realistic aspects of the film. In the 1919 **expressionist** film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*,

CGI (computer-generated imagery) Images that are not photographically produced but are created on a computer.

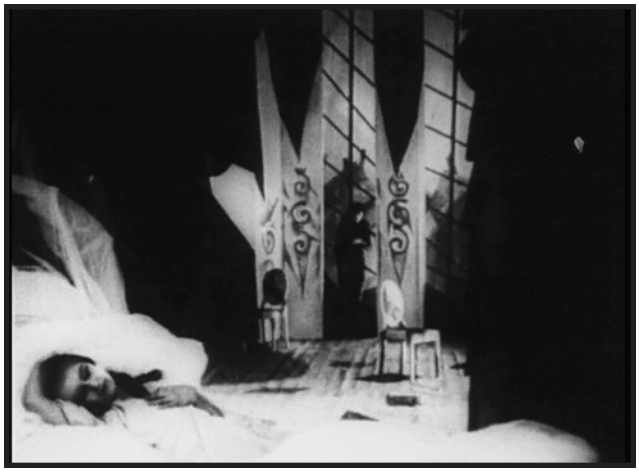
expressionism A cinematic style with roots in painting that emerged in Germany between the two world wars. Expressionism is visually characterized by chiaroscuro lighting and highly stylized sets. The best-known expressionist filmmakers are Fritz Lang, F. W. Murnau, and G. W. Pabst.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

UNIVERSAL/WING NUT FILMS / THE KOBAL COLLECTION

3.14 and 3.15 For a key scene in Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* (2005), Naomi Watts was filmed in front of a green screen and held in a mock-up of the giant ape's hand (covered in green canvas). The composite final version of this shot includes a skyline shot replacing the green screen background and the ape's hand in CGI.

3.16 Zachary Quinto, playing Spock in *Star Trek* (J. J. Abrams, 2009) is filmed on the bridge set (top image) in front of a green screen. The green screen portion of the image is replaced by an image of the elevator interior, creating the illusion that the character is in a different place on the ship.



3.17 The expressionist, painted sets reveal the tortured mental state of the "narrator" in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1919).

3.18 The fantasy sets for Oz suggest a place that exists only in Dorothy's imagination. *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939).

for example, the hand-painted sets (fig. **3.17**) are not meant to realistically reproduce the streets of Holstenwall, where the film is set, or the apartments in which the characters live. Instead the sets hint at the narrative frame of the story, that what we see is in essence the dreamscape of the film's addled narrator, a patient at a psychiatric hospital. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the dreamscape setting is meant to evoke and express a nightmare mental state from which no escape is possible.

Some films—like *The Wizard of Oz*—use both fantastic and realistic sets. The highly stylized and colorful sets that characterize the dream world of Oz (fig. **3.18**) are contrasted with the drab, homespun Kansas, which seems by comparison colorless (fig. **3.19**). The film's final message, that "there's no place like home," may seem to be at odds with the appeal of the sets, but

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.19 Compared with Oz, Kansas, a real place albeit reproduced on the studio lot, is drab and colorless. But there is more than one way to look at the film's payoff line, "There's no place like home."

3.20 The underground factory in Fritz Lang's futurist parable *Metropolis* (1927).

3.21 The Reality Wrecking Yard in Francis Coppola's *One from the Heart* (1982). Hank stands amidst the ruins of Vegas's fabricated neon culture.

that may well be the point: that Dorothy needs to get her head out of the clouds and learn to appreciate the comfort of the familiar.

In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, the highly stylized, expressionist sets of the futurist city correspond to a larger creative argument about the exploitation of workers in the capitalist system. The atomization of the future factory worker is dramatized by the sheer scale of the built environment (fig. **3.20**). Note the size of the various support structures and the factory machines in the background. At the center of the image stands the film's reluctant hero, dressed in white, tiny and alone, daunted and helpless.

In a nod to the conventions and illusions that characterize movie romance, the set of Francis Coppola's *One from the Heart* calls attention to its own artifice. When, for example, the film's hero Hank is bereft after being dumped by his girlfriend Frannie, we find him moping around the aptly named Reality Wrecking Yard (fig. **3.21**). He is, at this point in the film, an emotional wreck. The mountains in the distance are an obviously painted backdrop, and the wrecking yard itself is by design unconvincing as an exterior image (e.g., the artfully arranged junk, the abundance of empty space in what should be a crowded junkyard). Unlike in most movies, this set is deliberately designed to look like a set.

3-1f Props

Once the carpenters, electricians, and painters complete their work, the set dressers step in. Their job is to put the final touches on the constructed set—to add objects (lamps, paintings, photographs, kitchenware, audio equipment) that match the design sketches. Objects added by the set dressers—the artfully arranged "junk" in the Reality Wrecking Yard in *One from the Heart*, for example—are called **props**, short for *properties*.

Early on in the history of cinema, filmmakers recognized the value of props. Slapstick and knockabout performers in silent film comedies, for example, often interacted imaginatively with inanimate objects: for example, Charlie Chaplin's elegant dance with a broom in *The Bank* (1915), or his use of a gas streetlight to subdue a neighborhood bully in *Easy Street* (fig. **3.22**).

In *Sherlock Jr.*, Buster Keaton structures an extended gag around a single prop, an exploding pool ball. First, as a sort of magician's "reveal" (in which

prop Short for *property*, an object placed in the set. Props may play a significant part in the action.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.22 The streetlight gag in Charlie Chaplin's 1917 comedy shot *Easy Street*.

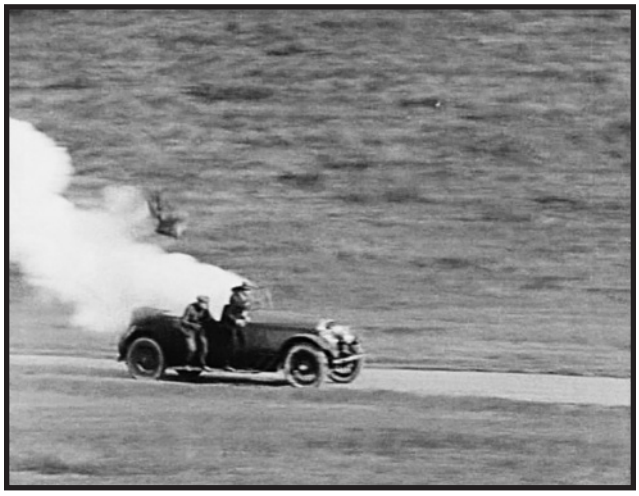
3.24 Keaton's sleight-of-hand at the pool table in *Sherlock Jr.*

3.23 A simple prop, a complex gag: the exploding 13-ball in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924).

3.25 A second "reveal" . . . Sherlock Jr. is ready to lob the villain's weapon back at him.

the trick is set up), one of Sherlock Jr.'s adversaries substitutes the exploding ball for a real ball (fig. **3.23**). A game ensues and to the frustration of the villains, the detective pockets ball after ball, somehow never touching the 13-ball. Finally, on the last shot of the sequence, he pockets the 13-ball, but the explosion we have been waiting for fails to happen (fig **3.24**). Not until later in the film do we discover how this trick was performed. In an extended chase scene during which Sherlock Jr. rescues his girlfriend, the detective pulls the exploding ball out of his pocket (where we gather he has concealed it all along) and tosses it at his pursuers, sending them careening off the road (figs. **3.25** and **3.26**).

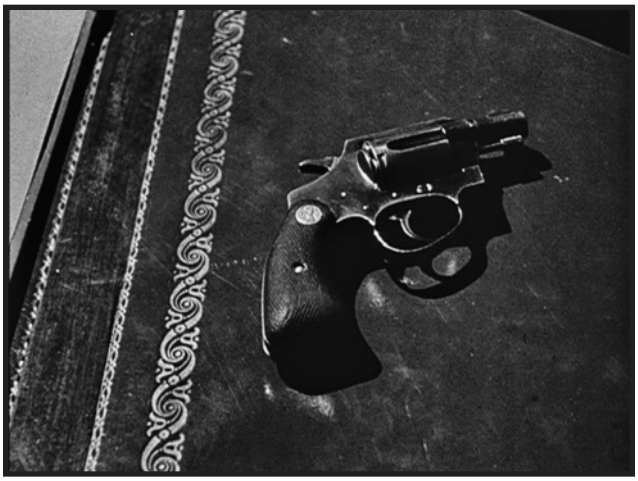
Props can hold plot-turning significance. In *sex, lies, and videotape*, Ann finds an earring under her bed. She holds it up so she (and we) can have a closer look



3.26 The comic payoff: the 13-ball foils the villains' pursuit of Sherlock Jr., enabling his escape with the girl he adores.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.27 The plot of *sex, lies, and videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989) hinges on a single (and small) prop, an earring found under a bed.



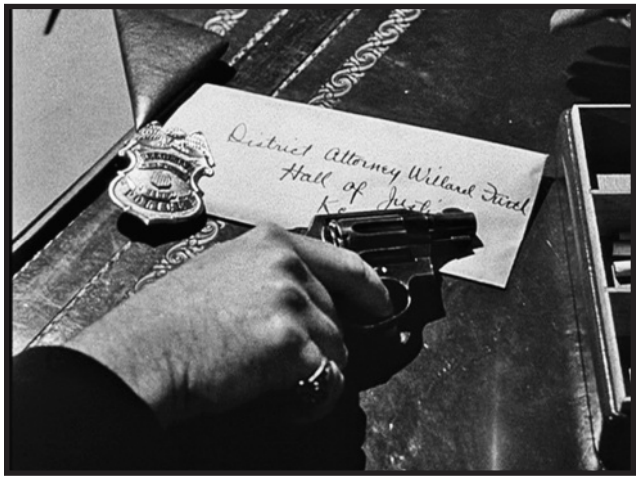
3.28 The film's opening shot: a gun. *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953).

and all at once we recognize the earring . . . it is her sister's (fig. **3.27**). Together we surmise the rest—that Ann's sister is having an affair with Ann's husband.

Everyday objects like clocks and watches are often used as props to establish time in the plot; in an action film or thriller they cue us that time is of the essence. Periodic looks at Snake Plissken's watch in *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1982) remind us of the little time he has left to rescue the president. Frequent shots of clocks in the 1952 western *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann) have a similar effect; like the film's hero we acknowledge that time is passing, that the time before the showdown is closing fast.

The opening scene of the crime film *The Big Heat* illustrates how strategically placed props can tell a story. Through the series of shots that introduce the film's plot, not a single line of dialogue is spoken. All we have to work with is the mise-en-scène, especially four significant props.

3.29 A strategically placed prop lets us know that it's the middle of the night.



3.30 A gun, a badge, and a letter.

First we see a gun on a desk (fig. **3.28**). Apropos the stage and cinema adage, "if you introduce a gun, someone better use it," the gun is picked up by a character who remains off-screen, and then we hear it fired. The character's head falls forward into the frame, and we gather that he has used the gun to shoot himself. We then see a woman responding to the sound of the gunfire. She pauses in front of a clock at the top of the stairs; it is 3 A.M., the dead of night (fig. **3.29**). We then see three props strategically placed together: the gun (still in the man's grasp), a police badge, and a sealed envelope addressed to the district attorney (fig. **3.30**). Absent a single line of dialogue, we know that a policeman has shot himself and has left a suicide note addressed not to the woman at the top of the stairs, whom we assume (correctly) to be his wife, but to the district attorney to whom such a sealed confession suggests crimes or corruption the policeman can no longer keep secret.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3-2 COSTUMES, MAKEUP, AND HAIR

Mise-en-scène also includes the look of the actors who are costumed, made-up, and coiffed to resemble the fictional or historical characters they play on screen. Costume, makeup, and hair are important to the overall effect of an actor's performance. They are important as well to the overall design scheme: the color palette, the degree of stylization, the time, and the place of the film.

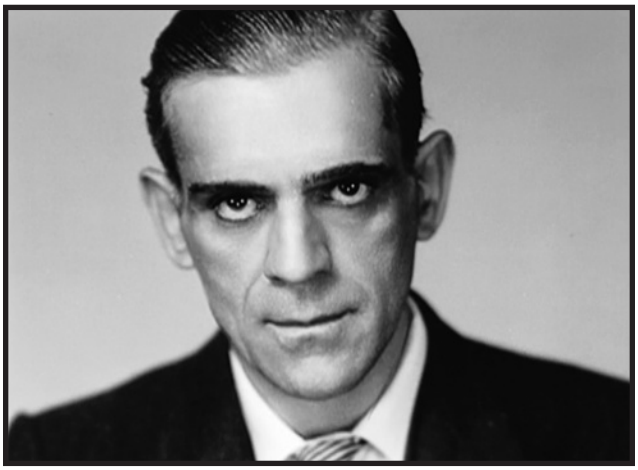
3-2a From the Drawing Board to the Screen: Costumes, Makeup, and Hair

The team responsible for "human design" begins with the raw material, the actor's physical features. Then, so-called movie magic behind the scenes is used to transform the performer through costume, makeup, and hairstyle. We tend to notice elements of human design most in certain genres: horror, historical or period pictures, and science fiction—films in which actors are made to look somehow different from people we are likely to meet today. In the seminal Hollywood monster film *Frankenstein*, for example, the actor Boris Karloff wore elaborate makeup to play the famous monster. While the notion that such makeup was somehow realistic seems beside the point—the monster after all does not exist—what the Universal Studios makeup artist Jack Pierce achieved proved convincing and endures in our collective consciousness as the look of Frankenstein's monster.

The Hollywood legend is that the director James Whale saw Karloff on the studio lot dressed in a suit and spied something in the actor's facial bone structure. Under the pretense of discussing the lot of British actors in Hollywood (both Karloff and Whale were from England), Whale befriended Karloff and convinced him to test for an unidentified role in a forthcoming picture, which turned out to be the role of the monster in Whale's *Frankenstein*. When we look at the before and after pictures of Karloff, first in a suit circa 1931 (fig. **3.31**) and then in his makeup as the monster (fig. **3.32**), we can see the skill of Pierce and Universal's makeup department, and also we can see that Whale was right—there really is something cadaverous about the actor's facial bone structure.

Makeup, including skin prosthetics, is not just the stuff of monster movies. Indeed, makeup is routinely used to fix a character's age at a certain time in the narrative. For films that span a wide range of historical time, changes in makeup and hair can key the changes. Such changes may be subtle: accentuating wrinkles or dark circles under the eyes, a greying of the hair. Or prosthetics may be used to attend to a greater span of time, as in Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man*. The lead character and narrator of the film, Jack Crabbe, is played as an adult by Dustin Hoffman. The actor was at the time 33 years old. The character he played ranged from his 20s through well over 100 (figs. **3.33** and **3.34**).

An image from the era depicted in a period film can be the starting point for the director and design team. For example, in Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, the design team used Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's



3.31 Boris Karloff at Universal Studios in 1931.

3.32 Karloff as Frankenstein's monster. *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931).

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.33 Dustin Hoffman as a twenty-something Jack Crabbe in Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man*, (1970).

3.34 Same actor. Same character. About 100 years later (in the story told in the film).

Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

3.35 Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's 1778 portrait of Marie Antoinette.

1778 portrait (fig. **3.35**) as a source for the costume, makeup, and hair in a playful scene of the young queen enjoying the pleasures of court life (fig. **3.36**). Note the billowy white garment, the feathered headpiece, the white pancake makeup, and the heavy rouge on the cheeks. The set, makeup, hair, and costume design work hand in hand so that the actress Kirsten Dunst looks like the famous image of the legendary monarch; the design work also implies that the character is a confection of sorts, like the candies and cakes she so loves. While Sofia Coppola's film toys with historical accuracy—much of the music is pop, rock, and hip-hop, and Marie behaves like a contemporary American teenager—the mise-en-scène grounds the story in pre-revolutionary France and creates an evocative portrait of the young queen.

3.36 Kirsten Dunst as the eighteenth-century French queen in *Marie Antoinette* (Sofia Coppola, 2006).

3-2b Communicating Character through Costumes, Makeup, and Hair

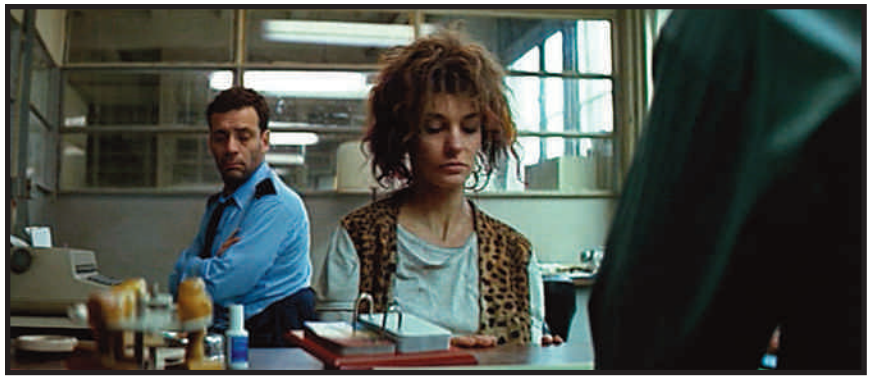
Costuming, makeup, and hairstyle are part of a film's visual shorthand; we can apprehend a character's social standing, occupation, even their attitude toward life by how they are made to look by the costume, makeup, and hair departments. The titular character in the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski*, a slacker par excellence who goes by the nickname "the Dude," lounges for much of the film in baggy shorts and a filthy T-shirt, unshaven

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.37 Jeffrey Lebowski (left), AKA "the Dude," abiding at the bowling alley, dressed in his signature baggy shorts and rumpled T-shirt. *The Big Lebowski* (Joel Coen, 1998).

3.38 Julian, in one of his several Armani suits, with a client in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* (1980).

and unkempt, his hair greasy and long (fig. **3.37**). His slovenly appearance corresponds to a carefree existence in which, as the film's loopy cowpoke narrator tells us, "the Dude abides." What happens, then, is that his *appearance* of being carefree is challenged at every turn of the plot. Thugs toss a marmot into his bathtub and soil his rug. He loses the other Jeffrey Lebowski's ransom money, and his bowling buddy Donnie is gunned down by pseudo-anarchists. Throughout the Dude *looks* like the wrong guy in the wrong sort of movie, which makes his predicaments all the more entertaining.



3.39 The ragged petty thief, Nikita, just after her arrest. *Nikita* (Luc Besson, 1990).

3.40 New clothes, makeup, and hair transform Nikita, the street urchin, into a sophisticated superspy.

Conversely, Julian, the preening male prostitute in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo*, is meticulously dressed in custom-tailored Armani suits, his face always clean-shaven, his hair perfect (fig. **3.38**). When he is falsely accused of a murder and his upper-class clients abandon him, the façade comes undone. We see a less polished version of Julian as he desperately searches for the real killer among the lower-class hustlers with whom he once worked. A former client who provides him with an alibi for the night of the murder saves him from a prison sentence. And more important, he is redeemed because she has "bought" more than just the façade; indeed she has seen through his polished image to the real man inside.

Character transformation—from human to monster (*The Wolfman*), from tramp to millionaire (*The Gold Rush*), or from mousy secretary to the Catwoman (*Batman*

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.41 Robert DeNiro as the boxer Jake LaMotta in his prime. *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980).

3.42 Same actor, same film, different look: Robert DeNiro as Jake LaMotta, nightclub owner and retired boxer

Returns)—can be accomplished when an actor's performance is supported by changes in costume, makeup, and hair. In *Nikita*, Anne Parillaud (in the title role) begins the film dirtied-up in ragged clothes, dull makeup (no lipstick), and unkempt hair (Fig. **3.39**). After her secret training as a spy and assassin, she is the picture of French female sophistication in a tailored black blazer and pearls, her hair cut and combed to perfection, her makeup now highlighting her eyes and lips (Fig. **3.40**). It helps of course that Parillaud, like most movie stars, is beautiful in the first place.

Some actors undergo months of special diets or exercise to reshape their bodies for a role. In *Raging Bull*, Robert DeNiro trained for weeks to play the boxer Jake LaMotta in his fitter, younger days and then gained sixty pounds to portray LaMotta overweight and boozed-up later in life (figs. **3.41** and **3.42**). While prosthetics, hair, and makeup certainly contributed to the character's transformation over time (note, for example, his receding hairline and bulbous nose in the later-day shot), it is the actor who embodies the change and truly makes it credible.

3-3 BLOCKING AND PERFORMANCE

Not only is the look of the actors an aspect of mise-en-scène, but so is their positioning within the set. Where the actors move within the space—which film and theater directors call **blocking**—is carefully worked out before the cameras roll. As we will see, blocking conveys story information and can create a compelling image. Yet acting is more than mise-en-scène, of course; the actor must convincingly embody the character through posture, gesture, facial expression, and voice.

Performance is at the most basic level a key to engaging audiences: if we can believe in the actor's portrayal of a character, we can believe in the fictional world that character inhabits. The actor's performance also needs to fit the visual language of a film; a film that strives for naturalism would require a different acting style from one that is highly stylized. The point here is that actors are more than visual design elements, though on a very basic level they contribute to the larger visual language of the film.

blocking The choreographed positioning of actors and camera(s).

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3-3a Blocking and Narrative

The term *blocking* is used to refer to the choreographed positioning of actors and camera(s). Combined with framing (discussed in chapter 4), blocking is a key aspect of composition created by an integration of mise-en-scène and camera work. A key aspect of blocking is rooted in stagecraft and involves the playing out of a scene as actors move to specific "marks" (often taped or drawn on the floor) following scripted cues, preset lines of dialogue or scripted physical actions. Blocking can be static (characters standing or sitting in place for an entire shot) or fluid (characters moving to prescribed marks). For most Hollywood movies, blocking is meant to appear natural, to simulate realistically how people might position themselves as they talk and act in a given setting. But while the goal may be realism, blocking is seldom improvised or inadvertent.

A pivotal scene in the 1937 romantic comedy *The Awful Truth* illustrates how blocking supports the story. Jerry and Lucy are recently divorced. Dan is Lucy's new beau, an Oklahoma oilman who is sweet but dull. Jerry wants to break up Lucy and Dan. Dan's mother, who enters the scene late, also wants to break up her son's relationship with Lucy. A close look at the blocking shows how the physical relationships among the characters shift to support the story arc over the course of the scene.

The scene begins as Jerry arrives at Lucy's apartment. He steps into the room and stops between Dan and Lucy (fig. **3.43**). Dan then walks behind Jerry and moves next to Lucy, putting his arm around her (fig. **3.44**). The blocking subtly reveals Jerry and Dan's struggle for Lucy's affection.

Jerry notices Dan's possessive gesture and to make Dan uncomfortable, he refers to Lucy's habit of keeping important legal documents in her stocking drawer ("every legal paper we had smelled of sachet . . . even the marriage certificate"). After Jerry reminisces about a practical joke played by a bellhop during their honeymoon, Lucy pulls out from under Dan's embrace, walks behind both men, and sits down on the arm of a chair. Dan sits on the loveseat and then Jerry sits quite close to him, again taking the space between Dan and Lucy (fig. **3.45**). We recognize from the theatrical blocking as well as the familiar romantic comedy trope that this romantic triangle will have to be sorted out.

Dan's "Ma" enters the scene and walks to her mark. In doing so she strategically increases the space between Dan and Lucy (fig. **3.46**). Ma has arrived after hearing an account of Jerry and Lucy's divorce, gossip that puts Lucy in an unfavorable light. She recounts some gossip about Lucy and her handsome music teacher: "You do

3.43 Jerry's arrival at Lucy's apartment in *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937).

3.44 A simple gesture unsettles the scene.

3.45 The three characters keep changing places, chairs, and positions in the frame.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.46 Dan's Ma endeavors to (literally and figuratively) come between her son and his new girlfriend, Lucy.

3.47 The men sit at the bottom and edge of the frame while the two women sort things out for them.

3.48 Here staging reveals the inevitable couples: Jerry and Lucy, Dan and his Ma.

sing divinely, dear, but I never realized until this afternoon that you had a teacher—and a very handsome one I understand." After a cut to a shot revealing Dan's discomfort and Ma's pleasure at unsettling her son's relationship with Lucy, the characters are reset to new marks: the men sit at the bottom and edge of the frame while the two women stand. Now that there are four characters in the scene, the split is more amicable; with a romantic triangle, one person is sure to be left out. With four, it's simpler, just a matter of pairing off (fig. **3.47**).

Though the uncertainty regarding the night Lucy spent with her music teacher did lead to their divorce, Jerry calls Ma's accusations regarding the music teacher "silly." Tongue firmly in cheek, Jerry "defends" Lucy's honor. While Jerry talks, Dan moves to a mark behind his mother. The two couples are now as they should be, as they will be at the end of the film: Jerry and Lucy, Dan and his mother. Significantly, in this last image from the scene, the men stand at the periphery as the two women occupy center stage (fig. **3.48**).

3-3b Blocking and Visual Design

In addition to using blocking to visually communicate the dynamic among characters, filmmakers think about the placement of figures in terms of the design of the image. In Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*, for example, the migrant farm workers are spaced across the frame in a way that is balanced and beautiful; they are depicted as a harmonious part of the larger prairie landscape (fig. **3.49**).

In an image set on the following day (fig. **3.50**), we see these same workers harvesting wheat. In both images, individuation and performance are beside the point: the human figures are part of the larger design of the shots; they are aspects of the setting.

A similar use of staged human figures is apparent in the breathtaking Death Valley sequence in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. From a great distance we see young lovers as they decorate the barren landscape (fig. **3.51**). We have no idea who they are or why they are there, but that doesn't really matter. Instead, we see them as organic aspects of a dramatic geographic setting.

Antonioni's emphasis on design over character in *Zabriskie Point* was nothing new. After a particularly disastrous reception at a screening of his groundbreaking melodrama *L'avventura* at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival, Antonioni proclaimed that cinema had grown overly tied to story, that filmmakers needed to return the medium to its constitutive, visual roots. His film

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.49 Migrant workers pause for a benediction blessing the harvest. Theatrical blocking as design: Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978).

3.50 Individuation and performance are irrelevant here; the human figures serve as props within the landscape.

3.51 Blocking used to create a compelling image: Young lovers litter the Death Valley landscape in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970).

rather intentionally disparaged narrative conventions and highlighted mise-en-scène.

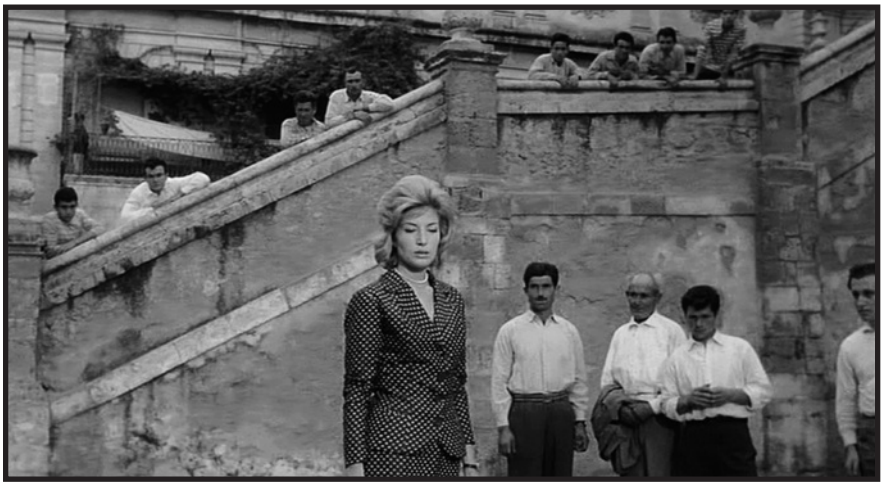
What little story we have to work with in *L'avventura* concerns Claudia's half-hearted search for Anna, a friend who went missing on a pleasure cruise. After Anna's disappearance, Claudia takes up with Anna's former lover, Sandro. The two drift together; and while Claudia has her doubts and regrets, she does little to discourage this new relationship. When Claudia and Sandro stop at a police station to inquire about the official search for Anna, Claudia waits outside and quickly finds herself the object of the gaze of several men (fig. **3.52**).

Antonioni carefully placed the figures within the frame to achieve a certain visual design, but he also used blocking for thematic purposes. When Claudia subsequently walks forward into the foreground of the frame, the men don't move, but their heads all turn to face her. We can see from her facial expression that she is now aware she is being watched (fig. **3.53**). In a subsequent shot, the men move closer to her. As they crowd her, the dramatic staging serves to heighten the seeming threat they pose (fig. **3.54**).

Antonioni never explains who these men are or why they look at Claudia the way they do. They can't possibly know what she's done (with her lost friend's lover) or what she hasn't done (she hasn't looked all that hard for her missing friend). Instead, it is in the relationship of bodies in space that Antonioni finds a visual equivalent for Claudia's shame and guilt. The apparent threat posed by these anonymous men, at the very least that they judge her harshly, is the very sort of uncomfortable moment she has endeavored all film to avoid.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.52 The pictorial equivalent of guilt and shame. *L'avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960).



3.53 A closer look at the same mix of emotions: Claudia realizes that she is being watched (and judged) in *L'avventura*.

3.54 As the men move closer to her, Claudia begins to worry that these strangers may mean her harm.

3-3c Screen Acting Styles

Though it is not technically an aspect of mise-en-scène, acting is at once dependent upon and a formal extension of design (costumes, makeup, and hair; blocking). The following brief introduction to certain key schools of acting suggests the significance of performance to the larger visual language of the film.

Performance styles evolve in tandem with other formal elements of the medium. Silent film acting resembled stage acting, much as many silent films were set and shot like stage plays. In the absence of dialogue, actors tended to signal emotions with exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. Even the subtlest silent screen acting eschewed realism in favor of heightened emotions; the dramatic superseded the realistic as filmmakers and film actors strived for a larger-than-life performance (fig **3.55**).

With the advent of sound cinema, a more naturalistic style of acting emerged to lend a heightened realism to the medium. But even as gestures and facial expressions became subtler, realism is a relative rather than absolute aim for the screen actor. The goal is to be convincing within the larger world depicted in the film, as two spy films released in the 1960s illustrate. In *From Russia with Love* Sean Connery plays James Bond, a spy with expensive tastes in wine, cars, and women, a swashbuckler who plays by his own rules (fig. **3.56**). Connery plays Bond with an easygoing, "anyone for tennis" style; he is at once unflappable and indomitable . . . a supremely suave and confident superspy. The success of Connery's performance lay in the actor's keen understanding of the

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

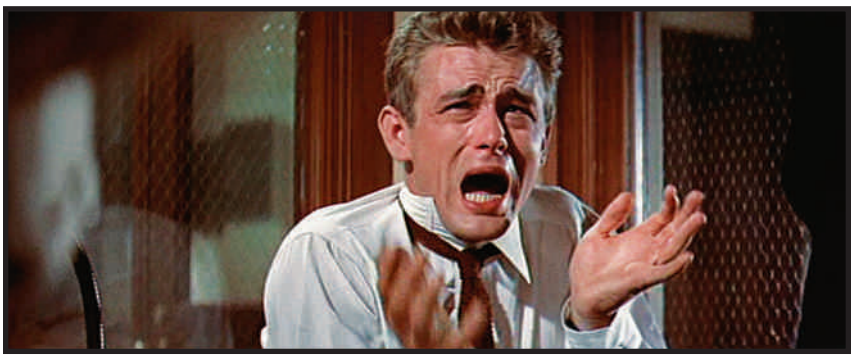
3.55 One of the most respected actors of her generation, Lillian Gish conveys sadness as she holds her dying child in her arms in D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920). Though less exaggerated in style than most silent screen acting, Gish's performance did not aim for subtlety of expression and gesture.

3.56 Sean Connery as 007 James Bond, the irresistible and irrepressible British spy in *From Russia with Love* (Terrence Young, 1963).

3.57 Richard Burton as the melancholy British spy Alec Leamas in the screen adaptation of Jon Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965).

sort of free-wheeling, high-concept action film he is in. Richard Burton's performance as the aging British spy Alec Leamas in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* released two years later is by comparison muted and melancholy (fig. **3.57**). Connery's Bond is a man of action; Burton's spy is a quiet, crafty operator. Both performances are successful not because the actors realistically reproduce the character of a British spy during the Cold War—after all most of us have no idea what makes such a person tick—but because they are believable, convincing, and interesting within the context of the respective films.

Many screen actors claim that their goal is a kind of truth, a psychological depth that can only be achieved by really understanding the motivations and emotions of the characters they play. Adherents of "the method" school of acting, for example, draw from personal experience rather than techniques of impersonation. In an effort to produce a fuller, more lifelike performance, method actors analyze not only the characters they play within the narrative but their own personal connection to the feelings felt by these characters at different points in the story. When James Dean used "the method" to get at the inner torment of the 1950s suburban American teenager, his every



3.58 When the method actor James Dean (as the suburban American teenager Jim Stark in Nicholas Ray's 1955 melodrama *Rebel without a Cause*) shouts: "You're tearing me apart!" his facial expression and hand gestures reveal the depth of his frustration.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.59 From the moment we see Tom Hanks as Captain Miller in *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1999), we make certain assumptions and have certain expectations about the character he plays.

gesture seemed to embody a discomfort in his own skin (fig. **3.58**). His contortions may well seem comical today given the transition to more naturalistic, more self-conscious acting styles, but in his day his performance proved nothing short of a sensation. Indeed, his portrayal was so powerful many American teenagers took a cue from the character Dean played in the film and displayed a theatrical moodiness to portray their ennui to their parents and teachers.

Finally, screen acting is often rendered secondary to the celebrity status of many of the performers. Audiences have since the advent of the medium found joy in the mere presence of movie stars onscreen. Some stars exude an essential goodness or humanity that audiences identify with and respond to. In Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, for example, from the moment we see Tom Hanks, we know certain things about the character he plays: that he is humble, humane, moral, and resolute (fig. **3.59**). Another star—someone familiar from action films, for example, or someone better known for playing villains—would bring a whole different set of expectations into the mix.

3-4 THE LIGHTS

Once the set has been designed and built and the actors dressed and placed, the scene must be lit. Indeed, lighting is designed much as sets and costumes are, and this design feature is integrated with the other elements to create the mise-en-scène.

Lighting design can highlight or eliminate shadows; it can brightly illuminate a shot, shroud an image in eerie darkness, or simply mark a time of day or night. It can direct our eyes to a certain portion of the frame, shape our impressions of the characters, or create a mood. Illumination fundamentally facilitates our view of the action on screen, and the way this is done is an important aspect of the visual language of the film.

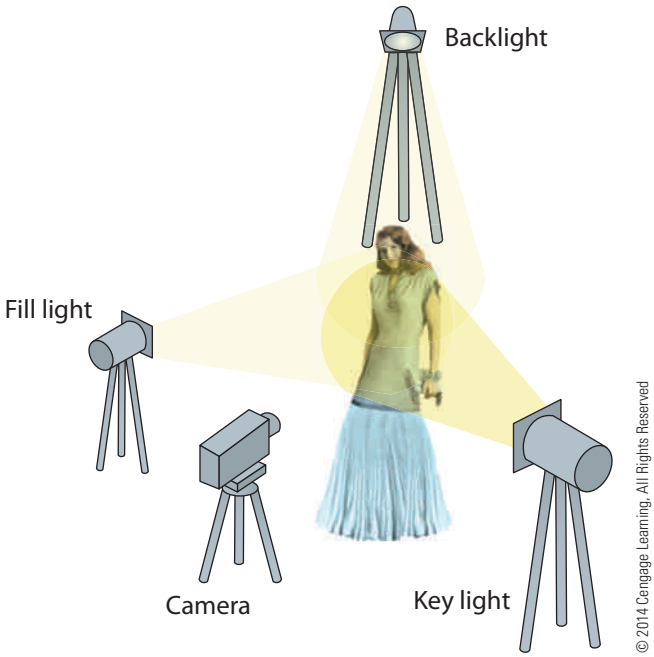
The cinematographer is charged with lighting design in concert with the film's director. The lighting scheme is then executed by the gaffer, grips, and other crew members on the set. Every shot we see in a film has been lit separately and differently. In each case, decisions are made about how many lights (sources) to use, where to place and aim these lights (direction), and how strong the lights should be (intensity or quality) to allow us to see the scene as the director intends, to engage us visually with regard to story, theme, and mood.

3-4a Three-Point Lighting

The fundamental lighting scheme in Hollywood film production is called **three-point lighting**, after the three sources of light on the subject (fig. **3.60**). The **key (main) light** is the primary lighting source, generally placed in front (though often not directly in front) of the principal object of the camera. The key light is the brightest light in the frame; it takes our eyes to a certain figure or object. The **backlights**, also called **rim lights**, can create

three-point lighting A balanced lighting scheme that employs three points of illumination: a bright light that directs our eyes to the subject (**key light**), a balancing (less intense) **fill light** that softens the shadows created by the key light, and a **backlight** behind the subject to add highlights.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.



3.60 Three-point lighting.

3.61 Balanced three-point lighting makes actress Rita Hayworth glow in Charles Vidor's *Gilda* (1946).

low-key lighting A lighting scheme that emphasizes key light and diminishes or sometimes eliminates fill and backlights. Low-key lighting creates greater contrast between the light and dark areas in the frame.

high-key lighting A lighting scheme that typically uses fill and backlights to lessen the contrast between the light and dark areas in the frame.

a halo effect if they are pointed at a character. But even when used more subtly, backlights can effectively separate visually the object (usually a character) from the background.

Fill lights accomplish what the term implies; using a less intense illumination, these lights fill in the areas not directly lit by the key light. The ratio of key light to fill light creates contrast in the image. Cinematographers refer to **high-key lighting** when the intensity of the key and fill lights are fairly close and there is thus comparatively little contrast between the light and dark areas of the shot; this is how the fill lights are used in three-point lighting. When there is strong contrast between fully illuminated and dark areas of the shot due to a pronounced difference in intensity between the key and fill lights, it is called **low-key lighting**.

When three-point lighting is balanced perfectly, as it is in so much of classical Hollywood cinema, the goal is often glamour instead of realism. In the 1946 film *Gilda* (fig. **3.61**), for example, the actress was lit in a way to convince audiences that Rita Hayworth's character was a *femme fatale*, a woman so beautiful she leads men to ruin. To accomplish the appropriate "look," the cinematographer used a key, or main, light to fully illuminate her face, while fill lights soften the image. The backlights form highlights (the light bouncing off Gilda's bare skin and hair) that produce the aforementioned halo effect, which is ironic here since the character is hardly angelic. The net effect renders the glamorous actress in as flattering a light as possible, which is often referred to by filmmakers as "soft" lighting.

Balanced, high-key lighting was the norm in classical Hollywood because it invited viewers to enter the space of a film easily and seamlessly, to simply *fall into* the world of the film. In more contemporary movies (many of which make frequent use of more high-contrast, low-key lighting for dramatic effect), high-key lighting is often implemented to accentuate the upbeat tone of a scene. For example, in *The Social Network*, we meet the Winklevoss twins—characters who are dismissed by Mark Zuckerberg in the film as upper-class dopes—in high-key, low-contrast light (fig. **3.62**). The lighting is

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.62 High-key, low-contrast lighting introduces the Winklevoss twins as happy-go-lucky jocks in David Fincher's *The Social Network* (2010).

3.63 Mark Zuckerberg, a stormy personality to say the least, is captured in low-key, high-contrast lighting. Here lighting is a design feature that complements the tone and content of the scene.

3.64 Low-key (high-contrast) lighting in Francis Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972).

one of the cues for the audience to share Zuckerberg's opinion and not to take them very seriously. Their nemesis, the antisocial genius Zuckerberg, is a far more complex (and perplexing) character. When he decides to develop The Facebook on his own, we see him in low-key, high-contrast light, a design element that sets the tone and content of the scene (fig. **3.63**).

3-4b Other Lighting Schemes

Balanced, high-key lighting creates a flattering, accessible, and often upbeat image, the goal of much of classical Hollywood cinema. As we have seen in figure **3.63**, low-key lighting offers an expressive as opposed to ideal lighting scheme.

Low-key (high-contrast) lighting can be used to heighten the sense of tension, as in Francis Coppola's *The Godfather* when the drug kingpin Sollozzo holds the Corleone family consigliere Tom Hagen hostage. A low-key-lit image of Sollozzo's face—which seems to float in a black void—offers an apt visual rendering of a man whose nefarious work in the drug trade has cut him off from legitimate society (fig. **3.64**). When we subsequently see Tom, he is by contrast half-lit, half dark—a telling physical portrait of the family attorney who is at once inside and outside the criminal underworld (fig. **3.65**). Such a bold contrast between light and dark is called **chiaroscuro**, a lighting style used to great effect in many gangster and horror films.

Filmmakers often use **under lighting**, in which a strong source light is positioned below the subject, to create a distorting, unsettling, or horrific effect. For example, in the offbeat suspense film *Blue Velvet*, director David Lynch under lights the gangster Ben, in part to make him look especially creepy but also to reflect Jeffrey's view of the scene. Jeffrey is at this moment

chiaroscuro Dramatic high-contrast lighting that exploits gradations and variations of light and dark in an image.

under lighting A lighting scheme in which the key or source light is placed below the subject.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.65 Chiaroscuro, created by light focused from a single source and direction into a dark space, is used frequently in gangster films like *The Godfather*. Though the key light is placed to the side here, as opposed to directly in front (fig. **3.64**), a similarly strong contrast between light and dark areas in the frame is apparent in both images.

3.66 The unsettling effect of under lighting in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986).

befuddled and afraid; he has been abducted by the terrifying gangster Frank Booth and taken to Ben's apartment, where Ben, at Frank's behest, implausibly breaks into song—Roy Orbison's soaring ballad, "In Dreams." To simulate some sort of strange stage show, Ben turns off the lights in the room and illuminates himself from below (fig. **3.66**). The lighting effect fits the oddball narrative and the unsettling nature of the scene: indeed this theatrical gesture makes little sense to Jeffrey or to us. (This shot also illustrates how the source of lighting can come from a prop within the scene.)

Top lighting, in which the source light is positioned above the subject, tends to be more flattering and more natural than under lighting. But it too can be used for dramatic effect, as in figure **3.67** from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, where top lighting is used to complete a stylized, postindustrial atmosphere. Note the way the top lights filter into the scene and how illumination from above is used to highlight the smoke billowing up just above the bounty hunter ("blade runner") Holden's head. Notice also how the backlights are used to silhouette Holden, here depicted alone in an office awaiting the arrival of his android adversary, the "replicant" Leon, whom he will subsequently interrogate. The top lights also highlight the chair in which Holden will sit—a seat that will become an important prop in the following scene when he gets too close to the truth about Leon. Scott uses top lighting in this our first view of Holden to keep us at a distance from him—we cannot see him clearly enough to read his face and body language. Top lighting conceals more than it reveals here, creating an atmosphere of suspense. The viewer doesn't know what is lurking in the shadows, which can be unsettling.

A subsequent top-lit shot in the same sequence shows Holden seated across the table from Leon (fig. **3.68**). This lighting scheme does little to "humanize" or distinguish between the two characters: Holden, whom we take to be an authentic human, and Leon, whom we will soon discover, is not. As such it fits the larger themes in play in *Blade Runner*, which is a film about the gray area between real and fake, the distinction between authentic humans and expertly crafted replicants.

top lighting A lighting scheme in which the key or source light is placed above the subject.

3-4c Tinted Light

Sometimes filters are used during production to "color" a scene for dramatic effect, as we can see in the example from *Blade Runner*, where grey-filtered light is used to accent the film's dull-metal color scheme and postindustrial look. A common way to accomplish this tinting effect is to place a thin sheet of polycarbonate or polyester, called in the trade a *colored gel*, in front of a

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.67 Top lighting in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).

3.68 Top lighting tends to be impersonal, even clinical, as in this shot from the opening scene of *Blade Runner*.

3.69 Blue filter matches the film's title (and title song) in *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986).

lighting fixture or window. In *Blue Velvet*, for example, the character Dorothy Valens sings the sixties standard "Blue Velvet" and is captured in a blue light (fig. **3.69**). Lynch's use of the blue gel is literal; it corresponds directly to the song. As such it fits the film's apparent self-reference, the constant reminders that its images and events are artificial and constructed.

An example of a symbolic use of tinted light can be seen in Martin Scorsese's 1973 gangster film *Mean Streets*. As Johnny Boy enters Tony's bar, the scene of his first meeting with criminal company in the film, the scene is bathed in red filter. It is hard to imagine that any bar is lit quite this way, so Scorsese invites us to read the tinted light figuratively, to match our/Johnny Boy's figurative descent into a (criminal) underworld (fig. **3.70**).

In both *Blue Velvet* and *Mean Streets*, color-tinted lights direct us to read the scene in a certain way. As such, the use of color tinting provides a design element and contributes to the narrative.

3-4d Natural and Artificial Light

Though it may seem illogical, filmmakers typically bring in artificial lights even when **natural light** is available. Indoors, light filters into real locations at various intensities through the day, and conventional lamplight is almost always insufficient for the filmmakers to adequately illuminate an indoor set. Even outside in daytime, natural light is not adequate. The position of the sun in the sky changes successively through the day, and clouds and shifting weather conditions also affect the light. It might take hours to film a scene that is supposed to represent only a few minutes of

natural light The use of natural sunlight (or occasionally moonlight) in exterior or interior scenes.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

3.70 Johnny Boy's arrival at a gangster hangout in *Mean Streets* (Martin Scorsese, 1973). The red tint affects the way we read the scene.

3.71 Artificial light creates the effect of sunlight streaming into the side and rear windows of the limousine that takes Sasha Grey to her next appointment in Steven Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009).

3.72 Natural light as neorealism in Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948).

neorealism A post–World War II film movement in Italy in which directors adapted the conventions of documentary realism in their fiction films. The best-known neorealist filmmakers are Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, and Vittorio De Sica.

Dogme 95 A group of mostly Scandinavian filmmakers who signed a manifesto, agreeing to abandon all aspects of Hollywood artifice. They use only hand-held digital video cameras, shoot only in natural light, and add no music.

story time, and to maintain that illusion, the light cannot change. Therefore, sunlight is almost always balanced with strategically placed artificial lights to create the impression of natural light (fig. **3.71**).

When feature filmmakers choose to use unfiltered, unadorned natural light, it is often as much an ideological as an aesthetic decision, as in **neorealist** films like Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (released in the United States in 1948 as *The Bicycle Thief*). In concert with other 1940s and 1950s Italian directors, De Sica shot in available natural light to more realistically present everyday life in postwar Italy.

The neorealists believed that cinema should tell the truth about the cataclysmic effects of World War II. De Sica endeavored to give audiences a real sense of what Rome (circa 1948) might have looked like on a sunny late afternoon, in this case the fateful sunny late afternoon when the forlorn father (in the foreground in fig. **3.72**) fulfills the promise of the film's title and in desperation steals a bicycle. Unlike the image of Sasha Grey in figure **3.71** in which natural light is simulated to soften the image, the natural light in *Bicycle Thieves* seems hard and harsh—the cold light of day, so to speak—which rather suits the unvarnished and raw reality of the film.

More recently, **Dogme 95** filmmakers like Lars von Trier (*The Idiots*; see fig. **3.73**) and Thomas Vinterberg (*The Celebration*, 1998) have vowed to eschew artificial light to create, per De Sica and the neorealists, an unmediated representation of contemporary reality. For these Dogme 95 filmmakers, their commitment to realist aesthetics (formulated as a set of principles or dogma that goes beyond issues of lighting) is meant to comment upon and provide an alternative to a popular, fantasy-based commercial cinema that seems to them to be dominated by fabrication and falsehood.

3.73 An interior shot in natural light in Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (*Idioterne*, 1998). The director adhered to the austere tenets of Dogme 95 in which no artificial "movie" lights are used.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The design elements of a film—the set design, hair, makeup, costumes (wardrobe), the staging of scenes, and lighting—combine to create its mise-en-scène. Together with camera work, the mise-en-scène is a key aspect of film composition.

3-1 THE SET

Learning Outcome: ***Describe the function of set design in the visual language of a film.***

- Sets are a significant part of the design scheme of a film and are typically meant to suggest the larger real space in which a story takes place. The set can be constructed or it can be a real location.
- The set plays a crucial role in transporting the filmgoer to a specific place, whether in the historical past or in the present or in an imagined place, and in providing insights about the characters' situations.
- In science fiction, futuristic, and fantasy films, the film set establishes a "creative geography" in which the story takes place.
- Contemporary filmmakers may use CGI to enhance or wholly create the set.
- For a handful of films, sets are deliberately artificial or stylized in order to serve an expressive purpose, such as evoking a character's mental state, making a creative argument about life in the future, or calling attention to the constructed nature of film.
- A prop can play an important role in a film: it can be the source of a gag, the object of a quest, or a clue for a character and/or the film viewer.

3-2 COSTUMES, MAKEUP, AND HAIR

Learning Outcome: ***Analyze costumes, makeup, and hair with regard to character development and visual style.***

- "Human design" (costumes, makeup, and hair) helps transform actors into the fictional or historical characters they play on the screen.
- In some genres (horror, science fiction, and historical dramas) the transformation can be especially dramatic.
- Costuming, makeup, and hairstyle can tell us about a character's social standing, occupation, and attitude toward life.
- Costuming, makeup, and hairstyle can also communicate a character's transformation over time, whether the result of age or a change in job or social status.

3-3 BLOCKING AND PERFORMANCE

Learning Outcome: ***Analyze blocking and performance with regard to design and narrative.***

- For most Hollywood movies, the movement of actors is meant to appear natural, but in fact the actors move to specific marks on the floor responding to preset lines of dialogue or scripted physical actions.
- Blocking communicates information about relationships among characters, including which character controls the dramatic situation.
- The blocking of human figures in a scene can be part of the larger design of a shot so that the figures are aspects of the setting, decorating the landscape.
- Though it is not technically an aspect of the mise-en-scène, acting is at once dependent upon and a formal extension of design (costumes, makeup, and hair; blocking).
- Acting styles evolve in tandem with other formal elements of the medium.

3-4 THE LIGHTS

Learning Outcome: ***Recognize how lighting schemes contribute to aspects of design and narrative, mood and meaning.***

- Three-pointing lighting is the fundamental lighting scheme in Hollywood film production. The three types of light used are (1) key, or main, lights, (2) fill lights, and (3) back, or rim, lights.
- When we analyze lighting, we focus on source, direction, and intensity (alternatively called "quality"). Low-key and high-key lighting schemes produce different levels of contrast between light and dark areas in the frame. Low-key lighting produces greater contrast, including dramatic chiaroscuro. High-key, low-contrast lighting tends to be more balanced, more flattering, and/or more upbeat.
- Lighting can be tinted to cast colors on the set and characters, and these colors can have significance to the meaning of the story.
- Even when the filmmaker uses natural light to give the film a more natural or realistic look, artificial lights may also be needed. Some directors are committed to realism and avoid the use of artificial lights as part of their filmmaking philosophy.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s).
Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

FOCUS on Mise-en-Scène: *Psycho*

Let's look at how various design elements work together in a single image from an early scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 suspense film *Psycho*. This shot is from an encounter between Norman Bates, the lonely psychopath and proprietor of a motel that has seen better days, and Marion Crane, an unlucky guest who will soon be killed by Norman. The scene is set in the parlor adjoining the motel office where the two meet for a snack; they discuss Norman's hobby, taxidermy. It seems at first an innocuous little conversation between a shy young man and an attractive woman who is clearly out of his league. But there is more to this little conversation than meets the eye, as implied by the mise-en-scène. A close reading of this shot tells us a lot about Norman and foreshadows his next, rather unhappy encounter with Marion in the bathroom of her motel room.

Norman's makeup and hair are unremarkable. The scary thing is that he looks ordinary. If he looked odd, Marion would pack her bags and leave.

Norman's face is half lit and half dark, also a result of low-key lighting and also suggestive of his dual nature.

Norman is pinned in the corner of the set. "We are all in our private traps," he remarks.

While the brass candlestick and chest of drawers do little more than decorate the set, the stuffed bird is an important prop. Marion's last name is Crane (like the bird). And while Norman "eats like a bird," he also shares (with some species of birds) a predatory nature.

The way Norman sits (his hand tucked between his legs), his mannerisms, and hand gestures are elaborate, birdlike, and feminine. He is, in 1950s parlance, a momma's boy, though not necessarily in the way we expect.

Norman wears a sports jacket but no tie. The open collar is at once informal and boyish. It speaks to his arrested development and (for 1960) to the informality of the Bates Motel.

A prominent shadow is the result of low-key, high-contrast lighting that is used frequently in images of Norman in the film. Norman has a dark side; one might say a dual personality. The shadow here hints at that.

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.

ANALYZE MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Use these questions to analyze how the basic elements of mise-en-scène contribute to the visual style and story content of a film. For a close analysis, it is better to pick a single image or scene. Begin by thinking about the overall effect of the mise-en-scène, and then focus on individual design elements.

- What do you learn about the story and characters—without the use of dialogue?
- Does the mise-en-scène attempt to be realistic or is it deliberately artificial?
- What emotional effect does the mise-en-scène have on you?

3-1 THE SET	• Take note of the interior and exterior architecture, furnishings, and props in the scenes. • What larger location for the story is suggested by these elements? • What time period is evoked? • What does the set tell you about the characters' personal lives and interests, working conditions, or social and economic status? • Does the set design represent an imaginary place and, if so, how might this be connected to a larger creative argument? • Is the set deliberately theatrical or artificial, and why? • Are there any key props in the scene, and how are they used? Do they provide clues to the action or have symbolic meaning?
3-2 COSTUMES, MAKEUP, AND HAIR	• If you are familiar with the off-screen look of the actors in this scene, how have they been transformed by wardrobe, makeup, and hair? • What can you tell about a character's social standing, occupation, and attitude toward life from his or her appearance? • Does the character change over the course of the film, and what role does costume, makeup, and hair play in commenting on this transformation?
3-3 BLOCKING AND PERFORMANCE	• Where are the characters sitting or standing in relationship to one another? What does this positioning tell you? • If the characters move around the scene, what meanings do those movements convey? • Does one character visually dominate the scene? • Do any of the human figures function purely as design elements in the scene? If so, what role do they play in the larger meaning of the scene?
3-4 THE LIGHTS	• Does the lighting direct your eyes to a certain figure or object? • Has the filmmaker used under lighting or top lighting to dramatic effect? • Are there sharp contrasts between light and dark areas in the frame? • Is a character shown in hard or in soft light? • Does the scene appear to have been shot in natural light, and is that choice an aspect of the film's meaning?

Copyright 2012 Cengage Learning. All Rights Reserved. May not be copied, scanned, or duplicated, in whole or in part. Due to electronic rights, some third party content may be suppressed from the eBook and/or eChapter(s). Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. Cengage Learning reserves the right to remove additional content at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it.